

1509/483.

LAST ADVICE

THE

LAST ADVICE

OF AN

OLD FATHER,

BEING A

LETTER FROM A FATHER IN THE COUNTRY  
TO HIS SON INTOWN.

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LAST ADVICE  
OF AN  
OLD FATHER.

SON JAMES,

P—, Jan. 5, 1793.

IT is now above three years since your mother or I have had a single line from you; and, indeed, I suppose you thought you had nothing to tell us about yourself, that we would have much joy in hearing, and so you judged it best to remain silent. But, though we have not heard *from* you, James, we have heard something *about* you; and that, in few words, is the chief reason of my now writing to you. Not that I think or can hope that it is to be of much good: For he that would never listen to his parents advices from their own mouths, or mind the tears that ran down their cheeks when they gave him those advices, will not probably be more moved at their writing; but that I may discharge my duty to the God that made me, and who will reckon with the fathers for the sins and iniquities of their children, if they have not done their part in instructing, warning and reproving them whenever they go astray; therefore, James, at this season, of the beginning of a new year, I will begin and reckon with you very shortly on that conduct which, I am sorry to say, you have pursued ever since you set out in the world; and, in this reckoning, I shall use plain words and tell you plain truths in the sincerity of my heart, but bitterness of my spirit: If they sound harsh it is not my fault: The wise man sayeth, "He that spareth  
"the rod hateth his son."

I bound



I bound you apprentice for five years to a creditable employment and with a worthy master, and paid for you what my circumstances could afford to one out of seven children ; and my purpose was, at the end of your time, to have given you a sum equal to your apprentice-fee to set you up reputably in business. How you fulfilled your indentures I refer to yourself.—You was idle and heedless at your hours of work, insolent to your master when he reprov'd you ; you took up with worthless drunkards, whoremasters and Sabbath-breakers, and was often seen drunk, even in a forenoon, in your master's shop and in the streets. You ran in debt to every mortal that would give you credit ; and you know that, in the three years before you broke your apprenticeship, I paid more for you at sundry times, to relieve you from prison, than the share that would fall to any one of my children, if my head were in the grave. And besides all this, when you ran off at last, and went to Edinburgh, you know how I still continued to pinch myself and my family to save you from misery and want, and set you up in a shop, upon your solemn promises and oaths that you would amend and forsake your wicked courses. But your word and your oath, James, were all alike ; for there never was a word of truth in your lips, and the fear of God was never before your eyes : And so your God has given you over to him that is the father of lies. And as you must, in all likelihood, end as you began, it would be a dispensation of mercy to your poor parents to hear that you died a fair death. But I fear, from the accounts we have lately had of you, that we have yet more to suffer of shame and misery on your account in this world. You have now, it seems, joined yourself to those idle, and vain and self-conceited fools who have made what they call *Associations for Reform* ; or, as the real meaning is, for overturning the Government, and we hear that you are

a main man at one of their clubs, and a great maker of speeches for sooth; and, as some say, the secretary of one of their societies. God knows what kind of a Reform the like of you would make! A poor ignorant wretch, that never in his life could cast up an account of pounds, shillings, and pence; a creature who never showed the least ingenuity but in low mean tricks, to cheat or to filch money; and whose heart, I speak it with grief and sorrow, is still worse than his head. Is it for the like of you to meddle with matters of Government? Poor creature! Where did you learn your knowledge in history and in politics, that should fit you to be a reformer of the State? Was it from your worthless and drunken comrades in an alehouse, or the vagabonds that were your companions when you lay in jail both in ——— and in Edinburgh? These were people very fit indeed to preach to you about the blessings of liberty, for they had some experience of what it was to be deprived of it; and both you and they, I suppose, would be clearly of opinion, that every man should both speak and write, and think and act just what he pleases, and that laws and magistrates and prisons and pillories were great restraints upon the natural *rights of man*, as your new Apostle Mr Paine calls them. But I will tell you a secret James, it is for the preservation of the rights of all *honest men* that a wise Government lays those restraints upon the *wicked and the worthless*; and they that are of the first class will feel no hardship, but a great blessing, from the restraints that are laid upon the last.

And so in your Reforming Club you complain bitterly of the grievances that you suffer. And what are your particular grievances, let me ask you, James. Is it that you are not rich and thriving, like some of the industrious burghers of Edinburgh? Whose fault is that, James? Had you followed their example you might have been in  
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their situation. They did not neglect the business of their shops for the care of the Government. They did not waste their time and their money in taverns and alehouses, speaking nonsense about long and short Parliaments, and equal representations of the people; they did not meet in clubs and associations for reforming the Constitution.—No, James, they were all day long at the head of their business, behind the counter, or employed in posting their ledger and their day book. They spent their evenings at home in sobriety and cheerfulness with their wives and their families. They went to church regularly every Sunday to thank God for the mercies of the week, and to offer to Him the sacrifice of a grateful heart for all the blessings they enjoyed—not repining at their lot, envying those that were above them either in power or riches, or murmuring at rulers and magistrates; but judging all in the spirit of meekness and of charity; fervently praying for their king and their country and its glorious constitution, from which neither they nor their fathers had ever suffered either tyranny or oppression, or grievance of any kind. Mark, James, he that follows the paths of honest industry and sobriety, and is mindful of his duty to God and to his neighbour, who loves his country, is obedient to its laws, and honours his king—that man will surely thrive, he will increase in riches and honour, and will find favour both in the sight of God and man.

And what other grievances have you and your associates to complain of, James? I will show you that ignorance, folly, and wickedness are at the bottom of every one of them. You and your friends, who call yourselves falsely *Friends of the People*, (for the main body of the people know the most of you to be knaves and hypocrites, and disclaim your friendship,) you and your friends, I say, complain loudly that the nation is oppressed, borne down, and impoverished by the heavy taxes which are  
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laid on you by the Government. Now, James, all this is a lie, and you and your friends know it to be so. For, though our taxes are many, we are better able to bear them at this day than we ever were when they were fewer. Our burden is lighter because our strength is greater. And how then have you the impudence to tell us that we are borne down and impoverished, when it is plain to every man of common sense that, with all our taxes, the nation is growing every year richer and richer? When there is not a man among us who is willing to work but gets the highest price for his labour, sufficient to maintain a family creditably and comfortably; and when all ranks of the people (always meeping the sober and industrious), are both better fed and better clad than their ~~honest~~ fathers and grandfathers ever were before them.

But you and your friends will say this may be true, that we are thriving in the main in spite of our heavy burdens, but take off those unjust burdens, and we shall be much more thriving than we are. Now, James, I will tell you that this fine argument shows both your folly and your wickedness. For, in the first place, as to the folly of it;—if you take off the taxes, it might at the best be an ease in some few articles to the rich, who in reality bear the whole burden of the taxes, though they would give the Government little thanks for that ease, as I shall tell you by and by; but the taking off these taxes would be no gain at all to the poor, but, on the contrary, a heavy loss to them: For see what is the effect of taxes upon all articles of trade or manufactures by which the poor make their bread. There is not a single article but as soon as a tax is laid on it, the trader or the manufacturer, not only indemnifies himself for the tax, but makes a profit on it by the advance which he puts upon the price: aye, and all the workmen that he employs,

make

make their advantage of it too ; for when the master trader is enhancing his profit, does not the journeyman get his share by a rise of his wages ? On the other hand, take off the taxes, must not the price of commodities fall of course, and consequently the rate of wages ?

But, in the next place, James, your fine proposal of abolishing the taxes has as much wickedness as folly in it. You call them *unjust burdens* ; but it is you that <sup>are</sup> unjust, when you say so. These taxes are raised to pay the interest of that great debt which is owing by the nation to its creditors, that is to those industrious men who made fortunes by trade and manufactures, and when the nation was in want of money to protect us against our enemies, or to support our government, lent their fortunes, many of them their whole fortunes, for these good purposes, trusting to the faith of the government to be paid the interest of their money. And so by cutting off the taxes, which pay this interest, you would rob these creditors of their just debts, and reduce a large proportion of the most industrious and wealthiest of the community all at once to beggary :—what would this be but the vilest cheating and knavery ? And pray mark, James, what must be the consequence likewise to all that depend on these wealthy men for their support, and what must be the effect upon trades and manufactures in general from the bankruptcy and ruin of those people who furnish the chief demand and consumpt for all the articles of trade and manufactures. In short, James, both in public concerns and in private, honesty is the best policy.

But you and your friends tell us, that the money that is raised by these taxes is wasted and squandred, and given away in bribes and pensions ; and this to be sure, if it were true, might very well be called a grievance. But this is another lie, James. For the main part of the taxes goes, as I have already told you, to pay debt, and the rest is for supporting that government which gives

us the blessings of peace and plenty and security; not by bribes and pensions but by paying fixed salaries to judges and magistrates, that protect our properties and our lives and liberties under the laws, and maintaining our brave soldiers and seamen that defend us against our foreign enemies. Must not all these be paid, James? And must not our worthy King, (whom God long preserve!) have likewise where with-all to support his dignity as the chief magistrate of the state? Would you have him, because he depends on his people for support, be kept in mean-ness and in indigence, when they are rich and flourishing and happy? And is it not the pride of a great and a generous people, that their King should likewise appear great and respectable? More especially when, as our sovereign, he has shewn himself through the whole course of his reign to be the kind and beneficent father of his people; and when, as an individual, he is in his own character one of the best and worthiest men within his own dominions?

And would you not have his ministers and his servants likewise maintained honourably and respectably, and in proportion to the great duties that they have to discharge, and the stations that they occupy.—If the people that grudge them their salaries, knew how dearly they were earned, and how little comfort they have in their exalted stations, considering their cares and their anxieties, and even their labour and drudgery, they would confess that there was small cause to envy them their offices, with all their emoluments.

As to the pensions that the King bestows, they are his own charities. They are paid from his own private purse; from that sum which his parliament grants him to be expended as he thinks proper, and which he might if he chose, consume in eating and drinking, in fine clothes, fine houses, and fine carriages, but which he  
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thinks better bestowed in giving to his old and faithful servants when they or their families chance to stand in need of it, or as rewards to private men whose learning and abilities have done honour to their country, or whose labours have done it service. — You and your friends, James, have made a great noise about this matter of pensions, and the publisher of one of your newspapers, who, as I am told, once served his Majesty as a captain, but now, (for good reasons, no doubt), has taken up the more honourable trade of serving the people, by teaching them that they are miserable, and oppressed, and enslaved by this King and by his ministers;—this gentleman having procured a copy of the pension-list for this country, by means of some worthy acquaintance, it does not signify whom, but surely a *virtuous good man* like himself, and a true *friend of the people*, printed it in the newspapers; and boasted of exposing, as he called it, the corruption and bribery employed by the crown, and the waste of the public money in hiring the supporters of a wicked and profligate ministry. And what was the consequence of this publication? Just the contrary of what this worthy newsmonger expected; for it appeared that a sum under five and twenty thousand pounds (less as I am told than the yearly profit of one single merchant's or banker's house in Edinburgh) was given by his Majesty to 250 persons, most of them of old respectable families, chiefly women, widows and their children, in narrow circumstances; that is, at an average, less than a hundred pounds a piece. And this too whether these families were or were not the friends of the government; for several were known to be just the contrary; and this indeed was the only thing that could be blamed in his Majesty's bounty; for they surely had little claim to favour or to liberality, who vilified and spurned at the hand that bestowed it on them.

And now, James, what are the *Reforms* that you and  
your

your friends would bring about? I saw some time ago in the newspapers, when you were a little more up-pish, and spoke out your mind more freely than you venture to do at present, (for somehow or other you are crest-fallen of late), that you were not only to give us a cheaper government, by taking away all bribes and pensions, and by reducing the King's income, or perhaps abolishing his office altogether; as your apostle Paine has proved him to be not only useless, but the cause of great evil and mischief; but that you were to reform us out of all our religion likewise, after the example of that blessed country France, where they neither acknowledge a King nor a God. For you told us plainly, that a *National Church* was a grievance which ought to be abolished; and that there should be no *established religion* in the land, but that every man should think and speak and profess whatever doctrines he pleased, and consequently, that he that denied JESUS CHRIST, as some of your new preachers do, and he that believed no GOD at all, might, if he pleased, get up into a pulpit and *blaspheme* instead of *praying*, or what is the same thing, instruct the people in Atheism, instead of the doctrines of Christianity. And this you and your friends call *liberty of conscience*. But may God defend this land from ever seeing such liberty, for it is the liberty of the devils in hell and that man must be worse than a devil who could seriously wish that he and his fellow creatures should be in such a state of reprobation†.

But

\* On Sunday the 16th of December 1792, Mr. Dupont declared in the French convention that the time was now come for abolishing all religion, and that men should acknowledge no other God but *Nature* and *Reason*. "For my part," said he, "I honestly confess before this convention that I am an Atheist." At this speech the whole assembly resounded with applauses; and when two or three good men seemed shocked at this blasphemy, and ran out of the hall, they were hissed and laughed at by all the rest.

But though these were once the opinions that you publicly professed, and therefore what we must believe that you still cherish, you and your friends, *the false friends of the people*, have become more cautious of late; and as you begin to perceive that the great bulk of this nation are neither weak enough to be cheated out of their senses and robbed of their happiness by knaves, nor wicked enough to join in the abandoned projects of incendiaries and outlaws, you are now forced to put on a mask of hypocrisy; and you profess now in your advertisements and resolutions, that you have the greatest respect for the King and for the constitution, and the highest reverence for the laws of your country, and that all you want is some *necessary reforms* in the constitution; and these reforms you are now so very moderate as to confine only to bringing about what you call an *equal representation* of the people, and a *shorter duration of parliaments*, which you say (*very wisely*) are the source of all the grievances which this nation labours under,

Now, in the first place, we have every reason to suspect, James, that this plausible pretext of reforming the constitution, in these two articles, is but a blind to impose upon us, and that, when once your reform begins, it will not stop there; but if your friends get their will, they will overturn the whole fabric of our government; and this we have good reason to suspect from what you have told us (as I mentioned before) and likewise from the great pains you and your friends have been at in distributing books and pamphlets into every quarter of the country, which are written for the express purpose of persuading the people to throw off all allegiance to the King and government, and all submission to the laws; teaching that our constitution is a system of tyranny and oppression, and that we are a nation of miserable slaves; and urging us to imitate the example of France, where they have nei-  
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ther King, Government, Laws, nor Religion of any kind. When you and your friends have taken the trouble and been at the expence of distributing through every corner of the kingdom these writings, so that there is not an ale-house that wants them, and scarcely a labouring man that has not either read them or heard of them, what are we to suppose your design to be, but that the people should be persuaded to believe these doctrines, and to follow that example that is proposed to them? It will not be your hypocritical professions of regard to the constitution or your sham declarations of loyalty that will take off the effect of your acknowledged actions and your well known base designs.

And after all, even if your pretended reform was to be limited to what you say; the bringing about what you call an equal representation of the people, and shortening the parliament, I wish you and your friends would explain to us how these things as they are at present have been the source of evil and mischief to the nation, or in what respect we should be a better or a happier people if they were altered according to your plan. For my part, as a plain honest man I think the great use of a parliament is to make just and wise laws for the people, and if the people are satisfied that these laws are wise and just, it is a matter of very little consequence who makes or chuses this parliament. I never had a vote, James, in the making of a member of parliament; and what the better should I be if I had? You say I am not *represented*, but that is giving us *words* without *sense*. For have not I the benefit of the laws of the kingdom as much as any man who gives his vote in an election; and who will tell me that there is one set of laws for voters and another for those that have no votes? or that there is one measure of right and wrong for the rich, and another for the poor? And even if I had a vote, or were *represented*,



*sented*, as you call it, in what respect should I have more to say in the making of laws than I have at present? I would join with 50 or 100 more of my neighbours and the majority of us would choose some considerable man to send to parliament; but would this man think himself bound to ask my opinion, and that of all my neighbours, in the making or altering any law that came before the parliament? And if he did not, what hand should I have in the making the laws more than him that had no vote at all?

And in the same way, as you and your friends are great dealers in *words* without *sense*, you tell us that no man can be bound by laws to which he did not give his *consent*; and he that has no *vote* has given no *consent*, and so the laws cannot bind him. But, James, this fine argument can impose upon none but fools; for any man of common sense must see that there would not be such a thing as a *law* in the world, if the consent of every single individual was required to the making of it. The only way in which the people can be said to consent to laws is by living under them, and enjoying their protection; and every man that does so, will find that he is bound by these laws, whether he had a vote in the making them or not. I do suppose, if a thief should plead that he had never given his consent to the laws against stealing, because he had no vote, and was not represented in parliament, that plea would not save him from the gallows, even though he had a jury of the *Friends of the people*.—Therefore take good care, James, you and your friends, and don't flatter yourselves that the laws cannot bind you because, forsooth, you had no vote in making them, for this will be the most unlucky mistake in politics that ever you made.

But with all your noise and clamour about an *equal representation*, you have never yet shewn us any scheme  
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for making this representation *equal*: For if your doctrine is true, that none can be bound without their own consent, then every person that has a will of his own, or can give his consent, is entitled to do so or to withhold it; and if you debar *him* or *her* from that right, (for women surely have their *wills* as well as men, and their *rights* too,) then, I say, these persons, whoever they be, are not represented; and, having given no consent to laws, cannot be bound by them. And therefore, before we obtain an *equal* representation, every human creature that wears a head on its shoulders must have a vote as well as a lord or a duke, or a landed gentleman. For suppose, James, that instead of 2 or 3000 persons in Scotland that may have their votes just now in electing members of parliament, there should be four or five times that number, and the qualifications should be reduced to a *fourth* part, a *sixth*, or even a *tenth* of what it is just now. What satisfaction would that be to all those, perhaps three fourths of the nation, that have not property to that amount? There might be many members of your own associations, *great Politicians* and *wise Lawgivers*, that would find themselves excluded from the roll of voters after all. And they would have the same reason to complain of injustice and of *unequal representation* that all who are not electors think they have at present.

And now as to the other part of your Reform, which is shortening the duration of Parliaments, and instead of *seven* years, abridging them to *three* or to *one* year, this scheme is *possible*, and so far it has the advantage over the other, which, to be effectually done, is actually *impossible*. But then, James, let me ask you a question, What good consequences are we to have from these *reforms*? What evils are to be cured or grievances remedied by them? You can surely give me an answer to this; for you and your friends have told us over and over again, in your newspaper

paper resolutions, that *all our evils* arise from these two causes; the unequal representation of the people, and the length of our Parliaments. Shall we have a set of wiser or honest Members of Parliament by this Reform than we have at present? I wish to hear your politicians prove that, and then perhaps I may come over to their opinion. Will there be less bribing and corruption among the new Electors, many of them indigent and needy men, than among the old who were generally men of some fortune? Will there be less rioting and tumult and idleness and drunkenness in the kingdom when this business is to be done once every year, than when it happens only once in seven? I should be glad to be convinced of these consequences James, and then I shall allow that some Good will arise from your Reform, but, till you and your political friends prove these points to my satisfaction, I shall be clear for just letting matters go on in the old train.

But I will speak plain truth to you James; and your own conscience, if you still have any, will tell you that it is so: You and your friends neither *expect* these good effects from your Reforms, nor do you *wish* or *desire* them. Your wish and your aim is to throw this kingdom into *Misery* and *Confusion*, that they who cannot thrive by honest means and by their own industry may then make their fortunes by the plunder of the virtuous and industrious. God forbid, indeed, that I should think so ill of every one of you; No, James, I firmly believe there are *some* among you well intentioned but weak men, who do not see the consequences of those schemes to which they are now made to contribute their assistance, and who would reject them with abhorrence if they did. But those that are the *chief men* at your clubs and meetings, and the most active and zealous among you that *speak*, and *print*, and *travel about the country* to make converts



converts to your new doctrines, I cannot, with all the charity that a Christian ought to have to his neighbour, think one whit better of them than I have said. Let me ask this simple question, James, Is there a single man of them that would refuse to accept of a good post or office under that Government that they are now abusing; or, who would not, if he got that post, not only give up his schemes of Reform, and desert his good friends of the association, but sing the praises of that very government, and those very ministers that he tells us are now ruining and plundering the country? If so, shame upon them for knaves and hypocrites; and silly fools must they be indeed that trust to *their friendship*, or are gulled by their pretensions to patriotism.

Another thing before I have done, James: Are those men the friends of their country who are actually conspiring with foreign enemies, sending messengers and deputations to a people that are at this moment in the act of murdering their king, and have declared war against every nation in Europe that does not follow their example;—inviting that people to send their armies over to conquer this country, and promising to give them all the aid they can in that attempt? We know that some of the friends of the people in England have actually done this, and whether some of our Scots friends may be far behind in their patriotism they best know.

Now, James, you have your old father's opinion upon all these matters, and God grant that you may lay it to heart, and that you may see the error of your ways before it be too late. This is my prayer and your poor mother's, morning and evening. As you have imitated the prodigal in the gospel in your evil courses, may it be the will of heaven that though late you may yet imitate him in your repentance. This from

Your Sorrowful Father

G — B — .

